Anthea:

Hi, this is Anthea Williams and welcome to 2RPH and Activated Arts. Today, we're talking about Bus Stop Films and Film Inclusion. Today, I have two guests with me, Audrey O'Connor and Tracey Corbin-Matchett. Tracy is an inclusion and diversity champion and CEO of Bus Stop Films. Tracy launched women in film and TVs, raising films strategy and has worked with Screen New South Wales on a number of strategic initiatives, including She Shoots and Screenability, which we talked about last month. Audrey Connor is an actress, a filmmaker, a writer, and an advocate who also lives with Down syndrome. She is passionate about creating stories that promote the visibility of people. Her film Visible will be part of this year's Vivid. Tracy, I have to say Bus Stop Films is one of my absolute favorites. We actually had [Emily Daesh 00:01:03] On here last month, talking about her film [inaudible 00:01:06]. I just thought it would be wonderful if you could tell our listeners a little bit about the company.

Tracy:

I love talking about up Bus Stop Films, so I'm happy to. Bus Stop Films, it's been in operation for just over 12 years, we're a not-for-profit organization that uses filmmaking and the film industry to raise the profile of people with disability on both sides of the camera. We do that in three ways. We do that through education, through our Accessible Film Studies Program of which Audrey is an amazing student in, which offers young adults living with disability, and primarily we focus on those with intellectual disability, a film school experience, and we deliver that in nine classes, across six locations in Sydney, Wollongong, Canberra, Parramatta, Brisbane, and we have an online program as well. We partner with film schools. We partner with actors, Griffith Film School, University of Wollongong, Screen Canberra and Information & Cultural Exchange. We employ emerging filmmakers to teach art classes, we have disability support workers.

Tracy:

We really fit that model of service [inaudible 00:02:16] to people with disability, which is ordinarily delivered by disability support workers first. But we pride ourselves on that. Our classes are delivered by emerging filmmakers, which also enables us to contribute to the ecosystem of the screen industry by employing people, filmmakers to come on and board our program. The students make amazing films. This year, we will have made our 50th film, which is really exciting. We have 90 students studying with us as well. Our films, screening film festivals, all around the world and where possible we will... In a pre-COVID time when we could travel, we would send our students all around the world to represent those films. We've sent students to Japan, to USA, to Russia, to New Zealand. Earlier this year, Audrey and I traveled to Melbourne to present a film at the Human Rights Arts & Film Festival which is really lovely to do. We really focused on advocacy as well, around authentic casting and employment for people with disability in the screen industry. We've supported just over 650 workplace opportunities for people with disability coming through our program to seek employment in the screen industry as well.

Anthea:

That's awesome. I thought I'd seen a lot of Bus Stop Films because I'd seen [inaudible 00:03:28], but it turns out I've only scratched the surface.

Tracy:

Yes. This year, we will make 13 films, which is no mean feat for a small production company.

Anthea:

Yeah, and look, I think what is really awesome about Bus Stop Films is, it's not just about making films that are written and have performance in them who live with disabilities. You also make sure that people with disabilities get experiences both in front and behind the camera. Can you tell me a little bit that?

Tracy:

We focused on inclusive filmmaking and we have a remit that with our productions, that means that our student cohort will be on set around 90% of the time. We use that 10% bandwidth for some people who may have sensory issues. They don't have capacity to be on set a hundred percent of the time. We all know being on set can sometimes be a bit of an overload and it's quite intense. We go with that bandwidth and we really believe that inclusive filmmaking is an end-to-end process that starts with the Genesis of an idea and working in a creative collaboration to develop that idea and through our program, primarily that the students are involved in every step of the way. That is the sound design, set design, costuming, working with the [inaudible 00:04:38] to set the schedule who can get the camera angles and then being on set and men being mentored by the heads of department and the students' work that sort of split the day in half.

Tracy:

They get an opportunity to work quite closely with the crew in the development of that. Then in that post production, viewing the [inaudible 00:04:57], providing notes to the editor and then ultimately walking the red carpet and participating on an institute panel when that film gets into festivals, because that's what filmmakers do. That to us is inclusive filmmaking. We really see the benefits of authentic storytelling and that model of inclusive filmmaking is beyond just casting people with disability on screen, which is great casting, it's involved in a production. Also, not all of our stories do feature people with disability on screen because they're filmmakers who happen to live with disability, who make amazing films and that those films could be about any themes. As you know as a filmmaker, you don't want to be sort of pigeonholed to only making films about one theme or one issue. You're want to be able to explore the myriad of stories you are to tell. They just happen to be made by filmmakers living with disability.

Anthea:

I completely agree with you. An artist, I don't really make stories about myself. Certainly in my theater work, I've really never made a theater work that's particularly about disability, my film work has. A lot of the skills I have, I have because I grew up with disability, but that's not the only thing about me. I completely understand that we all have a barrier to things we want to say. Audrey, can you tell our listeners a little bit about the film Visible?

Audrey:

Yeah, sure. I really love this film and I'm actually looking forward to seeing it myself, impressive. Visible, [inaudible 00:06:21] Visible at school. I felt my voice became quieter and quieter until I realized as I stopped speaking because [inaudible 00:06:32] me and wrong to pick on one person at a time. I want to be seen and heard. My opinion matters too. I love being able to tell my story in the short term, Visible. I hope people stop and think and act when they see someone being bullied, it's time to turn things around. Bad people who are bullies to be held accountable.

Anthea:

Yeah, I completely agree. And I'm right in thinking that your character becomes a superhero in this film.

Audrey:

Yes, it does. [inaudible 00:07:13], I've always felt like that when I was at school myself. I've always [inaudible 00:07:16] that I loved was actually Kim Possible. She kind of makes me feel like [inaudible 00:07:22], like being a fighter. When I was staying with her [inaudible 00:07:25] while I was turning out to like, feel like they're a little bit.

Anthea:

Awesome. I don't know Kim Possible. Do you want to tell me a bit about Kim Possible?

Audrey:

Yeah. Kim Possible is like a [inaudible 00:07:36] to me. It's a Disney animated show. Kim Possible is sort of like, [inaudible 00:07:50], but she's kind of like a detective, she's fighting missions and trying to help other people. She's like a fighter for me and just [inaudible 00:08:05].

Anthea:

Awesome. I believe that you've starred in some other films at the Bus Stop Films as well. Could you tell us a little bit about those?

Tracy:

Well, of course. I love Bus Stop Films and I love other films that we had done. Let's see, there was Heartbreak and Beauty, that I was in. Of course, Not a Wallflower. I can remember only those that I was in.

Anthea:

Can you tell us a little bit about Not a Wallflower because I haven't had a chance to see that one, but I've heard great things.

Audrey:

Well, I actually felt like I was [inaudible 00:08:40] for the role because I do think love is actually impossible to find, being like Not a Wallflower. I think it's about seeing, [inaudible 00:08:49], sort of like in those rows where the all the girls [inaudible 00:08:54] to pick out right flower.

Tracy:

It's a beautiful romantic comedy. Again, it is filmed that Audrey, is just a beautiful actress in the lead and her co-lead Ben who's another of our students is another amazing actor in lead. We've Mandy McElhinney, it's a rom com film in a [inaudible 00:09:14] and neither Audrey or Ben's disability plays any part in that production. They just happened to be amazing actors who are involved in the production and it's done so well around the festival circuit and hit the hearts of so many audiences.

Anthea:

I love that you've worked with Manny McElhinney, I've directed her a couple of times on stage and I directed her playing a version of Cinderella and Cinderella. I find it so funny that on television, often she plays these characters that are quite mean or quite emotionally stunted, whereas in real life, she's one of the most glorious kind human beings you could meet. I know she's loved working with Bus Stop Films. I actually first found out about Bus Stop Films from a couple of actors who I was working with, who told me how much they enjoyed working with you guys.

Tracy:

It's a brilliant film. I can share you a sneaky screen [inaudible 00:10:10]-

Anthea:

I would love that.

Tracy:

... it hits people in the heart. It's so beautiful, just such a beautiful film. It's [inaudible 00:10:17]. It's just that [inaudible 00:10:19], [crosstalk 00:10:19] and there's this beautiful thing when you walk into the florist and I don't know what the professional term for it, but your hair is flowing and your [inaudible 00:10:31] in this beautiful dress. This is a beautiful moment in a film and you can't help, but watch it and fall in love because your performance is so great. Ben, he is dishy, [inaudible 00:10:43] thinking of the heart problem, the Bus Stop Films cohort as well. He's an amazing [crosstalk 00:10:47]. Then to have Manny, bring her screen presence as a [inaudible 00:10:50], well, he's brilliant. It's a brilliant film.

Anthea:

It sounds absolutely gorgeous. It sounds really, really gorgeous. I think one of the things I love about Bus Stop Films is it seems to me that you're working from so many different angles to try to change the nature of the film industry and to try to make people feel more confident about working inclusively. I was wondering if you could tell us a little bit about the filmmaking toolkit and about the action training workshops.

Tracy:

Absolutely. The Inclusive Filmmaking Toolkit is that project that we developed with our sister company, Taste Creative, so Taste Creative, [inaudible 00:11:33] co founded Bus Stop Films and led the organization voluntarily for 10 years. In order to feed herself and to pay her bills, she has a commercial company, [inaudible 00:11:43] with her husband Henry, Tastes Creative and that's who did [inaudible 00:11:48] and Audrey's worked on a number of projects with them as well, really developing the toolkit was to snapshot their breadth of work over this decade of time and Taste sort of incubated Bus Stop to support many levels and consolidate it and make sure that the resource was freely available to anyone in the screen industry of all levels, fun guide on how to develop pre-production, how to direct an inclusive set. What does inclusive filmmaking look like?

Tracy:

It's hints and tips and guides. We developed that support from Screen New South Wales, and it's been really, really well received locally and internationally. The toolkit, I'm really proud to say it's being used by filmmakers with disability in order to work with production companies and employers about how to support them back into the workplace, which is a great outcome for it. It's a great guide as well. We want to sort of shape future generations of filmmakers. We've seen with the changes to the Oscar guidelines and commissioning guidelines here for ABC and such that, inclusion is that the fore and we've been doing it 12 years successfully to be able to give back to the industry through this toolkit. On the back of that, I'm quite active in the industry and a lot of the pushback and concern that I was getting from producers around employing people with disability, costing them [inaudible 00:13:07] was a lack of confidence.

Tracy:

It was a desire to employ. A desire to work. A desire to [inaudible 00:13:14], but it was that fear factor. As you know, people are scared of what they don't feel comfortable with. They look comfortable when you go the road most taken so you just stick with the people you know, the people you employ. I don't want to try [inaudible 00:13:24] people with disability because if I step it up, I'm going to get in trouble. We developed and on the back of how we support students into opportunities, into big projects like [inaudible 00:13:33] and [inaudible 00:13:35] was around going into the workplace first, meeting the teams, explaining to them how they might best support a person with disability in their team before we parachute the person into that situation. It's a culturally safe workplace.

Tracy:

On the back of that, worked with our amazing cohort of students, including Audrey, and one of our amazing advisory board members, [inaudible 00:13:56] to develop a training program for the industry called Inclusion Action, which is really around skilling up and instilling confidence in producers, production companies, policymakers, indie filmmakers, everyone so they feel more comfortable to employ, work alongside as a team member or creatively collaborate with people with disability in terms of how to develop projects. Purchase an inclusive film set [inaudible 00:14:19], and it's really around instilling that confidence, [inaudible 00:14:22] a greater understanding of intersectionality and disability pride and how to support people from a production perspective. We have been delivering it over the last year and a half. We got a grant through the Department of Human Services with the impetus that it was for the economic participation of people with disability in the community. Hopefully on the back of this and tangibly on the back of this, people have got jobs out of it.

Tracy:

It also employs people with disability into facilitation. We hire facilitators to deliver it. It helps Bus Stop as a disability led organization with our sustainability so it's really hitting the marks. I just did some back of envelope calculations yesterday. I delivered it to over 500 screenings to professionals here in Australia, state screen agencies for [inaudible 00:15:06], from Queensland, [inaudible 00:15:07]. It's been fantastic, Fremantle media, ABC, I've delivered workshops. So amazing to go to do so to filmmakers in Russia, online with Russian interpreter and Russian sign interpreting at the same time. It's just so amazing. I had participants joining from LA and Dubai, and it's really opened up opportunities for employment. On the back of people attending our workshop, they've come back to their employers and saying, "Hey, why aren't we employing more people with disability?" That has opened the door to Audrey in her internship at Afters to the pathway strategy. I'm working with ABC to really great opportunities to connect into the team at Fremantle and Netflix who are working on Heartbreak High.

Tracy:

Just this morning, Netflix announced an attachment strategy and people can apply to be part of that attachment through Bus Stop Films, because they know that the cohort of people following us, socials and who were connected with our filmmakers with disciplining the screenings. It's really opened up those conversations and people are coming away feeling, "Well, I'm going to give it a go. I'm going employ a person with disability on my team. I am going to consider how I cast. I'm going to consider how I develop my story." It's really changing the landscape of the advocacy work that we do in the screen industry to see that more people with disability are getting jobs. That's what the crutch of it is. It's we want more people employed because as a filmmaker you know who's behind the camera, it's going to impact the story we see on the screen.

Tracy:

We get more people with disability in those crew roles. There's a myriad of [inaudible 00:16:41] from the production office, to on set, to set design, to post production, whatever it is, even in the catering. Why can't we look at it and say, "Well, could that job be done by a person with disability?" And open up the pathways. That Inclusion in Action training together with the Inclusive Filmmaking Toolkit has been groundbreaking and really a great success in developing the training, Inclusion, National Training, we worked quite closely with our student cohort about what do they think filmmakers need to know and production companies need to know when they're employing them. We worked with the National Institute of Dramatic Art to make sure it was a really [inaudible 00:17:16] workshop. It's been really great. The take up has been great and the contribution of our students, like Audrey to make sure that it's developed inclusively and really tells industry what they need to know to feel more confident [inaudible 00:17:31] means.

Anthea:

That's absolutely amazing. I love that you have that understanding that most people are really open to doing this, but they have a lot of fear. And that fear is based on a lack of knowledge.

Tracy:

Yeah, absolutely. It's fear based because as humans, we are frightened of things that we don't know much about. We just go business as usual. As you know, production companies crew up, crew down, crew up, crew down as projects. I've even said to one of our cinematographers I work with the time, "[inaudible 00:18:00], I love you work, but I would love to come to sit one day and there's a woman in your team because you've got this great talented pool of guys that come and work with you, who we love. Wouldn't it be nice?" He's like, "Oh, I never really thought about that." Now I have a number of women that work in his crew and we still love working with him. He produces great films, amazing films with us. Sometimes, we just have to have conversations with people when they realize that they are kind of working the same team every time. That diversity brings new voices, new understanding, new ideas. If you can bring that into the development of the films and the projects all the way through, then you're going to get better stories.

Anthea:

Yeah, that is so, so true. When I made my short film, we had an 80% female crew and everyone commented that they didn't realize how different it was going to feel on set. But it felt really different on set. It was really lovely. I was so grateful for that experience.

Tracy:

Yeah, absolutely. It's a different way of thinking and sometimes we just need to be shown. The training's been great.

Anthea:

Yeah, I bet. Look, we are going to put a link to the Bus Stop Film's website on the notes for the show and the toolkit is just sitting there on the website so anyone can access it. It's the great place to start. From there, you should absolutely get in touch with Bus Stop Films and organize yourselves a workshop, or get involved with a workshop that's already happening. Both of you are going to be part of the Vivid and Arts Activated Conference coming up later in the year. You're going to be part of a forum, which is about disability in the digital arts. Disability has sometimes been called the final frontier and the avant-garde of filmmaking. How do you think an inclusive workplace and inclusive practices extend the art form that is filmed?

Tracy:

Well, it's [inaudible 00:19:59] new perspectives and new talent. The film that we all have premiering at Vivid is based on a poem written by Audrey, and then she got to work with her classmates to develop it. You can talk about that process, Audrey, about you took your classmates on the journey of your story and then turn it into a short film.

Audrey:

Yeah. It was actually fun, actually working with my friends, actually working on a project [inaudible 00:20:24]. I'll just say that, of course you know, because there were moments when they would explain what kind of have happened to me at school a little bit. I think that might have inspired them a little bit to add to this a little bit, but in a different way. We were exploring different things like doing the elements for the story, what it could look like. The whole thing was actually not having any dialogue, which is just kind of mostly true because when you're being bullied, it is isolating because it makes a person feel lonely and like they don't belong and it makes you feel insecure and being frightened. As you lose your self-confidence, it makes you lose your voice.

Anthea:

Is your film entirely without dialogue?

Tracy:

It's very low dialogue because it's designed to be screened on a big screen in a public space. It's very light on dialogue and really focus on Audrey's amazing acting skills and some [inaudible 00:21:29] effects. We worked with Animal Logic who are the team behind Peter Rabbit, [inaudible 00:21:34] Australia, the pinnacle of VFX and come and do this amazing green screen with Audrey because the film is Visible and so at times, Audrey becomes invisible? We use green screen and there's this theme that we filmed with. It's quite terrible to think now, but it was something that happened to you with the banana. Can you talk about briefly about that?

Audrey:

Yeah, basically, I had a similar experience when I was at school, actually, because of course in the film, the banana goes on my head, because it's quite mean, but I was finding myself just thinking about it. But when I was at school, actually I did have someone had a banana on me actually on my leg, [inaudible 00:22:21]. It's kind of like somehow related, but kind of different ways.

Tracy:

It was pretty amazing to film that and to have that contribution from Animal Logic to come to actors and take us through and then to see that in action on the project, their production as well. There's a few lines, but very much low dialogue. One of our lead actors was Nick, who is one of our students, who's deaf and he signs and he had a few words, but he did sign them. I actually think it's cost. We get to see it at Vivid on the big screen.

Anthea:

Yeah, hopefully the lockdown doesn't stop that.

Tracy:

In a month. It is a beautiful film. To have that VFX and that digital elements brought in to show the invisibility of someone when people with disability are excluded and that cloak of invisibility. Coming out of that, being very visible and very [inaudible 00:23:18] and calm and being accepted. It's a beautiful way to bring Audrey's story to the screen and to work collaboratively with the students to do that.

Anthea:

Yeah, it sounds remarkable. It also sounds like you've absolutely had to push the form to tell the story that hasn't been told before. It's fantastic that you've been able to do that. Look, I'm just aware that we're running out of time. Before we go Audrey, do you want to tell us what your job at Afters is at the moment?

Audrey:

Yeah, actually I work at Afters and work in the [inaudible 00:23:51], which is... I do work in the props and wardrobe store. I absolutely love it because I feel like it's like... Well to my mind it's like a place where I can actually sort of be [inaudible 00:24:06] a little bit, but in a different way. It's like seeing everything and you're touching them and putting them away or putting them [inaudible 00:24:15]. I just feel like it's having fun with them.

Anthea:

Awesome. Look, it's been so lovely chatting to you both. I wish we had longer to talk. Audrey, I can't wait to see your film. Tracy, I'm going to hold you this, sending me a screener because I really want to see the other film as well. That would be fantastic. I hope you have an amazing conversation at the conference and congratulations for making all your films. It's been lovely to chat.

Tracy:

Thank you so much, Anthea. Fingers crossed, Vivid goes ahead and we get to see Visible on the big screen. I'm sure [inaudible 00:24:47] to get to do our panel. We might get to throw it on soon, who knows. It's an unfolding thing, but the beautiful opportunity to be part of the Accessible Arts Conference and the Vivid events. It's this great panel with Audrey and [CJ Wright 00:24:59] and David Kernaghan and thinking about stuff, [inaudible 00:25:03] he's part of the Buffet family as well. To be able to, to bring all these amazing artists together, artists with disability, who are artists in the first instance and seeing the works that they've been working on and how the digital space is supporting them to come to life. Yeah, we can't wait.

Anthea:

Absolutely. I bet it will be a great conference. This is 2RPH and Anthea Williams with Activated Arts. [Hannah McColmack 00:25:33], how are you this month?

Hannah:

I've had a busy month between illness and creative projects. I have not been able to see many things that I wish I could have seen. I know

Anthea:

I know that you're in the middle of your [inaudible 00:25:47] development so tell us, what is it that you haven't been able to see this month?

Hannah:

First up is [inaudible 00:25:55], the long awaited collaboration between Raucous Ensemble and Mark Brew. it was originally set to premiere last year, but with choreographer Mark over in Glasgow and international travel shutdown, it's been mounted this year as an experiment in remote and hybrid forms of creation. Over the pandemic, we've witnessed a shift into online forms of art dissemination, but there's still a lot of uncharted area when it comes to making art collaboratively, remotely. It's really exciting to see companies doing nuanced experimentation this year, instead of continually falling into the in-person primacy bias. If we give the time and attention to figuring out how to use remote connection in an artistic context, I think we'll actually find some profound and impactful ways of creating and ways that will accessible to many more artists. It just takes the intention, the time and the sensitivity. I think the collaboration of Mark Brew and Raucous is the perfect match to pioneer this type of working.

Hannah:

Gloss [inaudible 00:26:57] was on at Northcote Town Hall Art Center, and it finished on the 11th of July. I wish I could have seen it and hopefully we'll have some future showings in the works. Also, we have on at the moment at West Space an incredible exhibition by Fund Evie, with collaborators contributors and the West Space community. We get in touch with things at the point they break down, even in the absence of spectators and audiences, dust circulates. Now the lineup here alone is exciting enough. There are so many incredible disabled artists in the mix here. It's just going to be a really exciting event and that's on until the 22nd of August at West Space in Collingwood Yards. Now, there are some kind of online components to this as well at West space's offsite websites. That's offsite.westspace.org.au where there are kind of traces and echoes and reflections of some of the works that are at this exhibition. Wonderful.

Anthea:

Wonderful. Those sound like amazing events. I also want to remind our listeners that at the beginning of August, the Arts Activated Conference is on. This is a disability conference running mainly online, but there are some events that are happening in space as well, depending on how the lockdown goes. You can go onto the Accessible Arts website to find out all about that. They have now announced all the events and it looks really exciting. Hannah, I think that you've had a little bit to do with that conference as well.

Hannah:

I have indeed, and I'll also be facilitating one of the panels that we have there and running a workshop on Access Riders. I hope to see some of you joining in remotely.

Anthea:

Awesome. Have a great month and I hope that the development obviously [inaudible 00:28:47] continues to go well.

Hannah:

Thank you so much.